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RELIGIOUS IMPOSTORS.

ALL excesses are dangerous, and none perhaps more so than an excess in devotional feeling. Of religious excesses, originating either in imposture or the delusions of an overheated temperament, the world has had many lamentable examples. During the last thousand years, there have appeared as many as twenty false Messiahs, besides an incalculable number of persons who have presumed, with equal impiety, to declare themselves to be prophets specially sent by God. History abounds in accounts of these deluded beings, and of their temporary success in working on the credulity of followers. For the sake of general information, and, if possible, to guard simple-minded people from being deceived by the claims of all such pretenders, we present the following account of a few of the principal religious impostors, or at least self-deceived fanatics of modern times, commencing with

MUNZER AND BOCKHOLT.

In the year 1525, amid the turmoil of the Reformation, there arose a remarkable sect in Germany, headed by a fanatic named Thomas Munzer, who declared himself to be an inspired prophet. The members of the sect pretended to be the peculiar favourites of Heaven, the chosen instruments of God to effect the millennium reign of Christ on earth. They believed that they had familiar personal intercourse with the Deity, that they were on an equal footing with the prophets and apostles of old, and were armed against all opposition by the power of working miracles. Their pretended visions, miracles, and prophecies, soon kindled the flame of fanaticism in the minds of the peasants. Their prophet and leader at length took the field, attended by his deluded followers, with the intention of overturning all governments and laws, giving as a reason that the world was now to be governed by the founder of Christianity in person. The elector of Saxony and other princes raised an army to withstand the dangerous pretensions of the sect. About five thousand were slain in battle, the leader of the mob was executed, and the fanaticism apparently quelled.

A few years later a similar delusion was propagated in Westphalia, a district in lower Germany, by John Bockholt, a tailor by profession, and a native of Leyden, in Holland—hence his popular name of John of Leyden. This man, with the aid of a few equally infatuated zealots, began to spread his doctrines in Munster, the capital of Westphalia, in the year 1533, and, as in all similar cases, soon gained listeners, some of whom became believers in his pretensions. John of Leyden, like a number of

his predecessors, assumed the character of a temporal prince. He persuaded his credulous followers that a new spiritual kingdom was to be established, and that Munster was to be its capital, whence laws should be sent forth to govern all the kings of the earth. This presumptuous idea was flattering to the mob, and the Leyden tailor gained continual accessions of adherents. As he went on, even the learned, including some monks, joined his sect, until at length he found himself powerful enough to venture on his great project. His followers rose suddenly in arms, attacked and deposed the magistrates, and became masters of the city. Immediately afterwards John of Leyden was proclaimed *king* of the New Jerusalem.

We have said nothing of the doctrines or personal doings of the man who thus got the sway of a great city containing many thousands of people. His extravagances are almost incredible. He married eleven wives, to show his approbation of the polygamy which prevailed in the times of *other* kings of Jerusalem; and to assimilate himself to a particular king of the Hebrews, he ran or madly danced, without apparel, through the streets of Munster. Other most offensive and pernicious acts were daily committed by this mock-monarch, whom it is charity to set down as insane. He of course saw visions and dreamt dreams in abundance. In one dream it was communicated to him, he said, that the cities of Amsterdam, Deventer, and Wesel, were given to him as his own. He accordingly sent disciples or bishops thither, to spread his new kingdom. In the state of the public mind at the period, these religious embassies were not, as they appear now, ridiculous. The Amsterdam envoy gathered so many proselytes, that he attempted to seize on the city. He marched his followers to the town-house on a given day, with drums beating and colours flying. Having seized on the house, he fixed his head-quarters there; but the burghers rose, and with some regular troops surrounded the fanatics; the whole of them were put to death in a severe manner, in order to intimidate others of the class.

It may well be imagined that the city of Munster was in a dreadful condition under John of Leyden, it being a doctrine of the sect that all things should be in common among the faithful; and they also taught that civil magistrates were utterly useless. Hence enormous crimes, as well as ridiculous follies, were practised continually—real enthusiasm of belief adding to the evil rather than diminishing it. The following incident is the only one descriptive of the insane and scandalous practices of the sect which we shall venture to record—a specimen is enough. Twelve of them met, five being women, in a private house. One of the men, a tailor by trade, having prayed for four hours in a sort of trance, then took off his garments, and throwing them into the flames, commanded the rest to do the same. All did so; and the whole subsequently went out to the streets, which they paraded,

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crying, "Wo! wo! wo to Babylon!" and the like. Being seized and taken before a magistrate, they refused to dress themselves, saying, "We are the naked truth!" Were it not for the sequel, we might simply feel disgust at this, as the doing, possibly, of shameless profligates. But when these very persons, instead of being placed in lunatic asylums, were taken to the scaffold, they sung and danced for joy, and died with all the marks of sincere religious enthusiasm.

John of Leyden did not long enjoy the throne of Munster. Its rightful sovereign and bishop, Count Waldeck, aided by other petty princes of Germany, assembled an army and marched against the city. The fanatics shut its gates and resisted; nor was it until after an obstinate siege that the occupants were overcome. The mock-monarch was taken, and suffered a cruel death, with great numbers of his wrong-headed associates.

The popular hallucination, however, did not end here. The severe laws which were enacted after the deaths of Munzer and Bockholt, in order to check the spread of their principles, were of no preventive value; perhaps the reverse. We are told by Mosheim, that immediately after the taking of Munster, "the innocent and the guilty were often involved in the same terrible fate, and prodigious numbers were devoted to death in the most dreadful forms." There is proof, too, as in the single case detailed, that even where great profligacy characterised their peculiar course of conduct, there was often mixed up with it such an amount of sincerity as ought to make us think of them with pity as beings labouring under a strange delusion, rather than blame them as persons erring under the common impulses leading to vice. "In almost all the countries of Europe, an unspeakable number of these wretches preferred death in its worst forms to a retraction of their errors. Neither the view of the flames kindled to consume them, nor the ignominy of the gibbet, nor the terrors of the sword, could shake their invincible but ill-placed constancy, or induce them to abandon tenets that appeared dearer to them than life and all its enjoyments." The more enlightened policy of modern times would either leave alone such unhappy beings, or consign them to the humane treatment of a lunatic asylum.

RICHARD BROTHERS.

Richard Brothers was born in Newfoundland in 1760, and for several years served as a midshipman and lieutenant in the British royal navy. In the year 1784 a reduction of the navy took place, and he was paid off, to live for the future upon an allowance of three shillings a-day. No particular eccentricities of conduct characterised Brothers up to the year 1790, when his under-

standing, according to his own showing, began first to be really "enlightened, although (says he) I had always a presentiment of being some time or other very great." The enlightenment took the shape of an objection to the oath which he was obliged by form to take in receiving his half-yearly pay, and which bears to be a "voluntary" attestation that the annuitant has received the benefit of no public employment during the term for which he draws his salary. Mr Brothers found here a difficulty which seems really somewhat puzzling. "I do not wish (he reasoned) to take any oath if I can possibly avoid it, and yet part of my attestation is, that I swear voluntarily. This makes me utter and sign a falsehood, as the oath is compulsory, my pay not being procurable without it." The head of the Admiralty (the Earl of Chatham) would not depart from the ordinary form in such cases, and Mr Brothers was left half starving, for the space of a year or so, on the horns of this dilemma. Anxiety of mind appears to have given the decisive bent, at this period, to his awakening fanatical tendencies.

The next tidings which we have of Mr Brothers result from the application, in 1791, of Mrs Green, a lodging-house keeper in Westminster, to one of the workhouses in that district, respecting a lodger of hers who owed her thirty-three pounds, and whom she was unable to keep any longer, as his conscience would not allow him to draw the pay due to him from the Admiralty. The workhouse board pitied the poor woman, who spoke highly of the honesty, good temper, and moral conduct of her lodger. They sent for Mr Brothers. "His appearance (says a writer who was present) prepossessed me greatly in his favour. He seemed about thirty years of age, tall, and well-formed, and showed in his address and manner much mildness and gentility." He answered questions calmly, though his replies were all tinged with fanaticism. The issue was, that the board took him off Mrs Green's hands for a time, and stated the case fully to the Admiralty; which body, on the score of the eccentricities deposed to by the widow, granted the pension to Mr Brothers for the future without the oath.

Richard Brothers, comparatively easy in worldly circumstances, now came before the world as a prophet. He did not publish his "great" works till 1794; but long before that time his prophetic announcements had been spread abroad, and he had made a mighty stir in the world. His house was constantly filled by persons of quality and fortune, of both sexes, and the street crowded with their carriages. There was at least one member of parliament, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, a gentleman known as a profound Oriental scholar, and author of some highly valued compositions, who openly espoused the views and cause of Brothers, sounding his praises in the British senate, and supporting him by learned dissertations from the press. Oxford divines did not disdain to enter the field as opponents of the new prophet;

scores of pious enthusiasts "testified" in his favour; thousands trembled at his denunciations of wo; and, in short, Richard Brothers became, what he "had always a presentiment of being some time or other—a very great man."

To glance at the mass of absurdities—blasphemous in the extreme, if viewed as the outpourings of mental sanity—which men thus allowed to arrest their attention, excites a sense alike of the painful and ludicrous. That the man was neither more nor less than a confirmed lunatic, appears on the face of every chapter. If there was any admixture of imposture in the case, certainly self-delusion was the prevailing feature. The following selections, which, so far from being the most gross specimens of his ravings, are only such as may without impropriety be set down here, will satisfy every reader of the diseased organisation of the prophet's head. He calls his work, which appeared in two books, "A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times," with a further heading, which could scarcely be repeated. He had found out in his visions that his ancestors had been Jews, though "separated from that race for fifteen hundred years, such a length of time as to make them forget they ever belonged to the name." The discovery of his Hebrew descent was an essential point, as the prophet was to be the "prince and restorer of the Jews by the year 1798." Absurd enough as this assumed genealogy was, what term should be applied to the further assumption, defended by Mr Halded in parliament, of such a descent as to render him "nephew" to the Divine Being!

One of Brothers's more important prophecies was, that London would be destroyed in 1791; and will it be credited that such a piece of nonsense should at the time have created great uneasiness in the minds of many persons in the metropolis? To finish the farce, London was *not* destroyed at the time predicted; but that only gave the prophet grounds for self-laudation: it was saved by *his* interposition! He describes minutely what the state of things would otherwise have been, in order, no doubt, to make the sense of the escape stronger. "London would have formed a great bay or inlet of the channel; all the land between Windsor and the Downs would have been sunk, including a distance of eighteen miles on each side, to the depth of seventy fathoms, that no traces of the city might be ever found."

Mr Brothers had many visions of solid temporal power and honours. In a vision he was shown "the queen of England coming towards me, slow, trembling, and afraid. This was communicated to William Pitt in the month called June 1792." In another vision he saw the English monarch rise from the throne, and humbly send him "a most magnificent star." What this meant the prophet could not at first tell, but it was "revealed" to signify that entire power was given to him over the majesty of England. A letter describing the vision, "with others to the king, queen, and chancellor of the exchequer, were put into the

penny post-office, to be sent by that conveyance, according to the directions I received on that head by revelation." But Brothers was still more direct in his announcements to the king of his coming fall. In his book he plainly says, "I tell you, George the Third, king of England, that immediately on my being revealed in London to the Hebrews as their prince, and to all nations as their governor, your crown must be delivered up to me, that all your power and authority may instantly cease." The "revelation" spoken of was to be effected openly and visibly. "I am to take a rod and throw it on the ground, when it will be changed into a serpent; to take it in my hand again, when it will be re-changed into a rod."

Can it be possible that ravings such as these, which are among the least objectionable in the book, brought carriages full of admiring people of quality to the door of Richard Brothers, and were defended by a learned senator of Britain less than fifty years ago? That they did so is undeniable; and here lies the apology for yet holding the case up to ridicule. But space and time enough have now been occupied with the task, and we must speedily draw to an end with Richard Brothers. He showed most fully the extent of his self-delusion, perhaps, on the occasion of his visit to the House of Commons. After formally announcing that he was about to do so, he went to that place for the purpose of prophesying to the members of wars and rumours of wars, and of directing them, as their true "king and minister of state," how to avoid the coming perils. Strange to say, the reckless speaker sent back the letter of the prophet with a messenger, who set him off with what he felt to be, "in such a public place particularly, unfeeling contempt and incivility." But the House of Commons had not yet seen the last of Richard Brothers. On the 4th of March 1795 the poor prophet was taken into custody, ostensibly to answer a charge of high treason, founded on the printed passages relating to the king, but in reality to try the sanity of the man in a regular way. He was tried, and was declared by a jury to be *insane*. The imputation both of insanity and high treason was combated, in two long speeches in the House of Commons, by Mr Halhed, and these speeches show both learning and ingenuity in no slight degree. But the case was too strong for Mr Halhed, and his motions fell to the ground unseconded.

Richard Brothers now fell under the care of the lord-chancellor as a lunatic, and passed the whole of his remaining days, we believe, in private confinement. Doubtless he would there be much more happy than in the midst of a world for which his unfortunate situation unfitted him. The victims of such illusions create a world of their own around them, and in imaginary intercourse with the beings that people it, find more pleasure than in any commerce with the material creation. Richard Brothers, as far as he lived at all for the ordinary world, lived only to give

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another proof of the strength of the superstitious feeling and love of the marvellous in man, as well as of the difficulty which even education has in repressing their undue exercise.

FEMALE FANATICS.

Within the last sixty or seventy years, the religious world has been scandalised by the wild fancies and pretensions of several female fanatics, equally mad or self-deceiving with the most visionary impostors of the male sex. We shall first speak of

Ann Lee.—This woman was the daughter of a blacksmith in Manchester, and having gone to America, she commenced her operations in 1776, near Albany, in the state of New York. A combination of bodily disease—perhaps catalepsy—and religious excitement appears to have produced in her the most distressing consequences. During the spasms and convulsions into which she occasionally was thrown, her person was dreadfully distorted, and she would clench her hands until the blood oozed through the pores of her skin. She continued so long in these fits, that her flesh and strength wasted away, and she required to be fed, and was nursed like an infant.

Deranged both in body and mind, she now began to imagine herself to be under supernatural influence; thought, or pretended, that she had visions and revelations; and ended with declaring that she was the woman spoken of in the book of Revelations, chapter xii.: 1. "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars; 2. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered; 5. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne." Mrs Lee further declared that she was the mother and leader of the elect; that she had the gift of tongues; that she could converse with the dead; and that she should never die, but ascend to heaven in the twinkling of an eye. Notwithstanding this confident prediction, she died; but her death was so far from opening the eyes of her dupes, that it rather confirmed them in the faith, and she still numbers several thousand followers in the United States. These deluded people believe that they are the only true church on earth; that they shall reign with Christ a thousand years; that they have all the apostolic gifts; and, like them, they prove all their doctrines from prophecy, as well as by signs and by wonders.

Jemima Wilkinson was another American fanatic who flourished at the same time as Mrs Lee. She was the daughter of

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a member of the Society of Friends of Cumberland, Rhode Island. Mentally deranged, her first visions occurred in 1775, when she pretended that she had been ill, and had actually died. Her soul having gone to heaven, as she alleged, she there heard the inquiry, "Who will go and preach to a dying world?" Whereupon she answered, "Here am I, send me." Her body, as she said, was then reanimated by the spirit of Christ, upon which she set up as a public teacher, to give the last call of mercy to the human race. She declared that she had arrived at a state of perfection, and knew all things by immediate revelation; that she could foretell future events, heal all diseases, and discern the secrets of the heart. If any person was not healed by her, she conveniently attributed it to the want of faith.

Mrs Wilkinson made many other extravagant pretensions. She assumed the title of universal friend; declared that she had left the realms of glory for the good of mankind, and that all who would not believe in her should perish. She pretended that she should live a thousand years, and then be translated without death. She preached in defence of a community of goods, and took herself whatever "the Lord had need of." Multitudes of the poor, and many of the rich, in New England believed in the truth of these frantic assumptions, and made large contributions to her. Some gave hundreds, and one even a thousand dollars for her use. In a few instances wealthy families were ruined by her. No detection of her fallacies undeceived her willing dupes. She pretended that she could walk on water, in which she signally failed. She pretended that she could raise the dead to life, but a corpse placed in a coffin remained dead in spite of all her efforts. Her own death occurred in 1819, and thus her claims to immortality were completely falsified. Yet her followers would not at first believe that she was dead. They refused to bury her body, but at last were compelled to dispose of it in some secret way. Mrs Wilkinson still numbers followers in the United States, who entertain the notion that she has left them only for a time, and will return again on earth.

Mrs Buchan, a resident in Glasgow, excited by a religious mania, announced herself in 1783 as a mother and leader of the elect. She likewise was resolute in proclaiming that she was the woman spoken of in the Revelations; that the end of the world was near, and that all should follow her ministrations. For some time she wandered from place to place, attended by hundreds of half-crazy dupes. This woman appears to have been one of the least selfish or arrogant of the class to which she belonged. She seems simply to have been a lunatic, whom it was cruel to allow to go at large. She announced that she was immortal, and that all who believed in her should never taste death; but in time, like all other mortals, she died; and this event staggered the faith of her followers. The Buchanites,

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as they were termed, are now, we believe, extinct. Perhaps some of them were absorbed by the next impostor-fanatic who appeared in England.

Joanna Southcott.—This person was born in Devonshire about the year 1750, of humble parents. In early life, and till near her fortieth year, she was employed chiefly at Exeter as a domestic servant. Having joined one of the Methodist bodies, her religious feelings were powerfully awakened, and becoming acquainted with a man named Sanderson, who laid claim to the spirit of prophecy, the notion of a like pretension was gradually impressed on her mind. Possessing a very inferior education, and naturally of a coarse mind, her efforts at prophecy, whether in prose or verse, were uncouth and unworthy of the notice of people enjoying a sane mind. There being, however, always persons of an unsettled turn ready to give credence to pretensions confidently supported, her influence extended; she announced herself, like her predecessors in England and America, as the woman spoken of in the book of Revelations; and obtained considerable sums by the sale of seals which were to secure the salvation of those who purchased them.

Exeter being too narrow a field for the exercise of her prophetic powers, Mrs Southcott removed to London, on the invitation and at the expense of William Sharp, an eminent engraver, who had become one of her principal adherents. Both before and after her removal to the metropolis, she published a number of pamphlets containing her crude reveries and prophecies concerning her mission. Towards the year 1813 she had surrounded herself with many credulous believers, and among certain classes had become an object of no small importance. Among other rhapsodies, she uttered dreadful denunciations upon her opposers and the unbelieving nations, and predicted the speedy approach of the millennium. In the last year of her life she secluded herself from the world, and especially from the society of the other sex, and gave out that she was with child of the Holy Ghost; and that she should give birth to the Shiloh promised to Jacob, which should be the second coming of Christ. Her prophecy was, that she was to be delivered on the 19th of October 1814, at midnight; being then upwards of sixty years of age.

This announcement seemed not unlikely to be verified, for there was an external appearance of pregnancy; and her followers, who are said to have amounted at that time to 100,000, were in the highest state of excitement. A splendid and expensive cradle was made, and considerable sums were contributed, in order to have other things prepared in a style worthy of the expected Shiloh. On the night of the 19th of October a large number of persons assembled in the street in which she lived, waiting to hear the announcement of the looked-for event; but

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the hour of midnight passed over, and the crowd were only induced to disperse by being informed that Mrs Southcott had fallen into a trance. On the 27th of December following she died, having a short time previously declared that "if she was deceived, she was at all events misled by some spirit, either good or evil." Under the belief that she was not dead, or that she would again come to life, her disciples refused to inter the body, until it began to be offensive from decomposition. They then consented, with much reluctance, to a post-mortem examination, which fully refuted Joanna's pretensions and their belief. The appearance which had deceived her followers was found to have arisen from dropsy. The pretended mission of Joanna Southcott might be expected to have been now thoroughly abandoned; but whether influenced by fanaticism or shame, her disciples clung to the cause of the deceased. They most reluctantly buried the body, without relinquishing their hopes. Flattering themselves that the object of their veneration would still, some way, reappear, they formed themselves into a religious society, which exists till this day in London, under the name of the Southcottian church. The members affect a peculiar costume, of which a brown coat of a plain cut, a whity-brown hat, with a long unshaven beard, are the chief features. Joanna Southcott was unquestionably, for the last twenty years of her life, in a state of religious insanity, which took the direction of diseased self-esteem. A lunatic asylum would have been her most fitting place of residence.

ROBERT MATTHEWS.

Some years ago a considerable sensation was created in the state of New York by the mad and grotesque pranks of Robert Matthews, who presumptuously laid claim to the divine character, and had the address to impose himself as a superior being upon some of the most respectable members of society. As no account, as far as we are aware, has ever been published in Britain of this remarkable affair, notwithstanding the interest which it excited in America, we propose to introduce a notice of it to our readers.

Robert Matthews was a native of Washington county, in the state of New York, and of Scotch extraction. At an early age he was left an orphan, and was brought up in the family of a respectable farmer in the town of Cambridge, where in his boyhood he received the religious instruction of the clergyman belonging to the Antiburgher branch of Seceders. At about twenty years of age he came to the city of New York, and worked at the business of a carpenter and house-joiner, which he had partially learned in the country. Possessing a genius

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for mechanical pursuits, and being of active habits, he was an excellent workman, and was in constant and lucrative employment. In 1813 he married a respectable young woman, and removed to Cambridge for the purpose of pursuing the business of a storekeeper; but the undertaking, after a trial of three years, failed. He became bankrupt, involving his father-in-law in his ruin; and in 1816 he returned once more to New York, where for a number of years he wrought at his old profession of a house-carpenter. Being at length dissatisfied with his condition, he removed in 1827 to what he thought a better field for his talent in Albany. While settled in this city, a remarkable change took place in his feelings. Hitherto he had belonged to the Scotch church; but now, disliking that communion, he attached himself to the Dutch Reformed congregation, and there gathering fresh ardour, at length surrendered his whole mind to spiritual affairs. While in this condition, he went to hear a young and fervent orator, the Rev. Mr Kirk, from New York, preach, and returned home in such a frenzy of enthusiasm, as to sit up a great part of the night repeating, expounding, and commending passages from the sermon. From this period his conduct was that of a half-crazy man. He joined the temperance society, but went far beyond the usual rules of such associations, contending that the use of meats should be excluded as well as of intoxicating liquors; proceeding on this notion, he enforced a rigid system of dietetics in his household, obliging his wife and children to subsist only on bread, fruits, and vegetables.

During the year 1829 his conduct became more and more wild and unregulated. His employment was still that of a journeyman house-joiner; but instead of minding his work, he fell into the practice of exhorting the workmen during the hours of labour, and of expounding the Scriptures to them in a novel and enthusiastic manner, until at length he became so boisterous, that his employer, a very pious man, was obliged to discharge him from his service. He claimed at this time to have received by revelation some new light upon the subject of experimental religion, but did not as yet lay claim to any supernatural character. Discharged from regular employment, he had abundant leisure for street-preaching, which he commenced in a vociferous manner—exhorting every one he met upon the subject of temperance and religion, and holding forth to crowds at the corners of the streets. Having made a convert of one of his late fellow-workmen, he procured a large white flag, on which was inscribed "Rally round the Standard of Truth;" this they raised on a pole, and bore through the streets every morning, haranguing the multitudes whom their strange appearance and demeanour attracted around them. A young student of divinity, catching the infection, as it seemed, united himself with Matthews, and assisted in the preachings in the

public thoroughfares. Matthews, however, was a remarkably bad preacher, and made little or no impression on his auditors. His addresses were incoherent, consisting of disjointed sentences, sometimes grand or bombastic, and at other times low and ridiculous, but always uttered at the highest pitch of the voice, and designed both in matter and manner to terrify and startle his hearers. The favourite doctrine which he attempted to enforce was, that Albany would be immediately destroyed, unless the people were converted; and he harped so wildly on this theme, that in a short time he became utterly distraught. All the efforts of his poor wife to restrain him in his mania were unavailing. One night he aroused his family from their slumbers, declared that the city would be destroyed before morning, and fled from his home, taking with him three of his sons, the youngest an infant of only two years. With these he travelled maniacally on foot for twenty-four hours, till he reached the house of his sister in the town of Argyle, a distance of forty miles.

The religious wanderings of Matthews the prophet, as he was called, may now be said to have commenced. With a Bible in his hand, and his face garnished with a long beard, which he had for some time been suffering to grow, in obedience to a Scriptural command, he wandered about, collecting crowds to listen to his ravings, and frequently disturbed the peace of regular meetings in the churches. Finding that he made no impression in the old settled part of the country, he set out on a missionary tour through the western states, penetrating the deepest forests, crossing the prairies, and never stopping till he had proclaimed his mission amid the wilds of the Arkansas. Thence he turned his steps to the south-east, recrossed the Mississippi, traversed Tennessee, and arrived in Georgia with the view of preaching to the Indians; but here he was seized by the authorities, and placed in confinement as a disturber of the public peace. Ultimately he was dismissed, and permitted to return towards his old haunts in New York and its neighbourhood, where he arrived in a somewhat new character. It would appear that till about this period Matthews was simply in a state of mental derangement, and, like all madmen in similar circumstances, was perfectly sincere in his belief. The small degree of success on his journey, his imprisonment in Georgia, and his utter poverty, may be advanced as a cause for an alteration in his conduct. He now lost a portion of his frenzy, and in proportion as he cooled in this respect, the idea of imposture seems to have assumed a place in his mind. There is at least no other rational mode of explaining his very singular behaviour. In the capacity, therefore, of half-madman, half-knave, Mr Matthews may be viewed as entering on his career in New York in the month of May 1832.

In ordinary times and circumstances, the intrusion of such a

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madman into a quiet mercantile city would lead to no other result than the committal of the intruder to the house of correction or a lunatic asylum; but at the period of Matthews's appearance in New York, a pretty large portion of the public mind was prepared for any kind of extravagance in religion, and therefore the declaration of his mission was looked upon only as another act in the drama which had for some time been performing. About the year 1822 a few ladies became dissatisfied with the existing means of religious instruction in the city, and set on foot the bold project of converting the whole population by a system of female visitation, in the execution of which, every house and family was to be visited by committees of two, who were to enter houses indiscriminately, and pray for the conversion of the inmates whether they would hear or not. This scheme created no little noise at the time, but, like all frenzies, it only lasted its day, and was succeeded by other schemes perhaps equally well-meaning, but equally visionary. Among the class of perfectionists, as they were termed, there were doubtless many estimable persons, and none more so than Mr Elijah Pierson and his wife. Mr Pierson was a merchant by profession, and, by a course of industry and regularity in all his undertakings, was now in opulent circumstances. Until the late religious frenzy agitated the city, he had been noted for his intelligence and unaffected piety, and not less so was his lady. In a short period his devotional feelings underwent a remarkable change. In 1828, after passing through a state of preliminary excitement, he became afflicted with monomania on the subject of religion, while upon all matters of business, as far as they could be disconnected from that on which he was decidedly crazed, his intellectual powers and faculties were as active and acute as ever. During his continuance in this state of hallucination, in the year 1830 his wife died of a pulmonary affection, which had been greatly aggravated by long fasting and other bodily severities. This event only served to confirm Mr Pierson in his monomania. He considered that it would afford an opportunity for the working of a miracle through the efficacy of faith. By a gross misinterpretation of Scripture (Epistle of James, v. 14, 15), he believed that his wife should be "raised up" from death while lying in her coffin, and accordingly collected a crowd of persons, some of whom were equally deluded with himself, to see the wonder performed in their presence. The account of this melancholy exhibition, which is lying before us, is too long and too painful for extract; and it will suffice to state, that notwithstanding the most solemn appeals to the Almighty from the bereaved husband, the corpse remained still and lifeless; and by the remonstrances of a medical attendant, who declared that decomposition was making rapid and dangerous progress, the body was finally consigned to the tomb.

Such was the hallucination of Mr Pierson, which many pitied,

and some were found to approve. Among the latter was Mr S——, also a merchant in good circumstances, but who had latterly become a victim to the religious excitement which prevailed, and, like Mr Pierson, often subjected himself to fasts for a week at a time, greatly to the injury of his health and the confirmation of his mania. Both gentlemen being thus in a state of mind to look for extraordinary events, a stranger presented himself before them on the 5th of May 1832. He had the beard of a patriarch, a tall form, and his language was of a high-flown cast on religious topics, which at once engaged their attention and sympathy. This imposing stranger was no other than Robert Matthews. The pretensions which he made were of a nature which we can scarcely trust ourselves even to hint at. That the tale may be told with as little pain to our readers as possible, let it suffice to say, that the *very highest imaginable character* was assumed by this unhappy man, and that the pretension was supported merely by the perversion and misinterpretation of one or two passages of Scripture. The character which he assumed he pretended to be in the meantime incorporated with the resuscitated person of the Matthias mentioned in the New Testament; and he accordingly was not now any longer Matthews, but Matthias. He had the power, he said, to do all things, not excepting those which most peculiarly belong to the divine nature. Mr Pierson and his friend believed all that he set forth of himself, then and subsequently, no matter how extravagant or blasphemous; and he in turn recognised them as the first members of the true church, whom, after two years' search, he had been able certainly to identify. He announced to them that, although the kingdom of God on earth began with his public declaration in Albany in June 1830, it would not be completed until twenty-one years from that date, in 1851; previous to which time wars would be done away, the judgments finished, and the wicked destroyed. As Mr Pierson's Christian name was Elijah, this afforded Matthews the opportunity of declaring that he was a revivification of Elijah the Tishbite, who should go before him in the spirit and power of Elias; and as Elias, as everybody knows, was only another name for John the Baptist, it was assumed that Elijah Pierson was the actual John the Baptist come once more on earth, and by this title he was henceforth called.

Mr Pierson very soon relinquished preaching, as did Mr S——, and the work of the ministry devolved entirely on Matthews, who, jealous of his dignity, would bear no rivals near the throne. The prophet was now invited to take up his residence at the elegantly-furnished house of Mr S——, and acceding to the invitation, he remained there three months. The best apartments were allotted to his use, and the whole establishment was submitted to his control. It was not long before he arrogated to himself divine honours, and his entertainer washed his feet in

token of his humility. The female relations of the family were sent away by the impostor, and he allowed no one to reside there but the black domestics who were of the true faith. From fasting he taught his disciples to change their system to feasting; and having their houses at his command, and their purses at his service—loving the good things of this world, and taking all the direction in procuring supplies—he caused them to fare sumptuously every day. But this splendid style of living was not enough. The prophet was vain of his personal appearance, and proud of wearing rich clothes. It was now necessary that he should be arrayed in garments befitting his character and the dignity of his mission. His liberal entertainer, therefore, at his suggestion, furnished him with an ample wardrobe of the richest clothes and finest linens. His favourite costume consisted of a black cap of japanned leather, in shape like an inverted cone, with a shade; a frock-coat of fine green cloth, lined with white or pink satin; a vest, commonly of richly-figured silk; frills of fine lace or cambric at the wrists; a sash around his waist of crimson silk, to which were suspended twelve gold tassels, emblematical of the twelve tribes of Israel; green or black pantaloons, over which were worn a pair of well-polished Wellington boots. Add to this, hair hanging over his shoulders, and a long beard flowing in ringlets on his breast, and we may have an idea of him in his public costume. In private he disused the black leather cap, and sometimes appeared in a nightcap of the finest linen, decorated with twelve points or turrets, and magnificently embroidered in gold by his female votaries. He usually preached in a suit of elegant canonicals.

Lodged, fed, and decorated in this sumptuous manner, Matthews spent his time so agreeably, that he became less anxious to make public appearances. His preaching was confined to select parties of fifty or sixty individuals, composing, as he styled it, "the kingdom," and by these he was held in the most reverential esteem. Occasionally, strangers were invited to attend his ministrations, but this was only as a great favour; and at all meetings he made it a rule to allow no one to speak but himself. He declared his rooted antipathy to arguing or discussion. If any one attempted to question him on the subject of his mission or character, he broke into a towering passion, and said that he came not to be questioned, but to preach. Among other of his vagaries, he declared that he had received in a vision an architectural plan for the New Jerusalem, which he was commissioned to build, and which for magnificence and beauty, extent and grandeur, would excel all that was known of Greece or Rome. The site of this great capital of the kingdom was to be in the western part of New York. The bed of the ocean was to yield up its long-concealed treasures for its use. All the vessels, tools, and implements of the New Jerusalem were to be of massive silver and pure gold. In the midst of the city was to stand an

immense temple, to be surrounded with smaller ones: in the greater temple he was to be enthroned, and Mr Pierson and Mr S—— were each to occupy a lesser throne on his right hand and on his left. Before him was to be placed a massive candlestick with seven branches, all of pure gold.

Any man in his senses must have perceived that this was the vision of a madman, but by his humble votaries it was considered a sure prediction of what would speedily come to pass. As long as it was confined to mere harangues, the public were not called on to interfere; the case, however, was very different when Mr S——, in obedience to the injunctions of the prophet, commenced ordering expensive ornaments for the proposed temple from a goldsmith in the city. Matters were now going too far for S——'s friends to remain any longer calm spectators of his folly, and both he and Matthews were taken up on a warrant of lunacy, and consigned to an asylum for the insane. Poor S—— was too confirmed in his madness to be speedily cured, and therefore remained long in confinement; but Matthews had the address to appear perfectly sane when judicially examined, and was relieved by a writ of habeas corpus, procured by one of his friends.

Upon his release from the asylum, he was invited to take up his residence with Mr Pierson; but that gentleman shortly afterwards broke up his establishment, though he still rented a house for Matthews and one or two attendants, supplying him at the same time with the means of living. In the autumn of 1833 he was, on the solicitations of Mr Pierson, invited to reside at Singing, in Westchester county, about thirty miles from town, with a Mr and Mrs Folger, two respectable persons, whose minds had become a little crazed with the prevailing mania, but who as yet were not fully acquainted with the character of the prophet. Mr Pierson afterwards became a resident in the family, and thus things went on very much in the old comfortable way. Only one thing disturbed the tranquillity of the establishment. Mrs Folger, who had a number of children, and was of an orderly turn of mind respecting household affairs, felt exceedingly uneasy in consequence of certain irregular habits and tendencies in the prophet, who set himself above all domestic discipline. The great evil which she complained of was, that he always took the meal time to preach, and generally preached so long, that it was very difficult to find sufficient time to get through the duties of the day. He often detained the breakfast-table so long, that it was almost time for dinner before the meal was over; in the same manner he ran dinner almost into supper, and supper was seldom over before midnight—all which was very vexing to a person like Mrs Folger, who was accustomed to regularity at meals, and could not well see why the exercises of religion should supersede the ordinary current of practical duties.

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The infatuation of both Pierson and Folger in submitting to the tyranny and pampering the vanity of Matthews, was demonstrated at this period in many acts of weakness which astonished the more sober part of the community. The impostor was furnished with a carriage and horses to convey him to and from New York, or any other place in which he chose to exhibit himself. Money to a considerable amount was given him on various pretences; and to crown the absurdity, an heritable property was conveyed to him for his permanent support. An allowance of two dollars a-day was further made to his wife in Albany; and several of his children, including a married daughter, Mrs Laisdel, were brought to reside with him in Mr Folger's establishment. After a short time, however, Mrs Laisdel was under the necessity of returning home, in consequence of her father's violent treatment.

This very agreeable state of affairs was too pleasant to last. Mr Folger's business concerns became embarrassed, and he was obliged to spend the greater part of his time in New York. The entire government of the household now devolved on Matthews; and he, along with Katy, a black female cook, who was a submissive tool in all his projects, ruled the unfortunate Pierson, Mrs Folger, and the children, with the rod of an oppressor. Certain meats were forbidden to appear at table; the use of confectionary or pastry was denounced as a heinous sin; and the principal food allowed was bread, vegetables, and coffee. What with mental excitement and physical deprivations, Mr Pierson's health began to decline; he became liable to fainting and apoplectic fits; but no medical man was permitted to visit him, and he was placed altogether at the mercy of the impostor. At this crisis Matthews showed his utter incapacity for supporting the character he had assumed. Instead of alleviating the condition of his friend, he embraced every opportunity of abusing him, so as to leave little doubt that he was anxious to put him out of the way. One of his mad doctrines was, that all bodily ailments were caused by a devil; that there was a fever devil, a toothache devil, a fainting-fit devil, and so on with every other malady; and that the operations of such a fiend were in each case caused by unbelief, or a relaxation of faith in Matthews's divine character. The illness of Pierson was therefore considered equivalent to an act of unbelief, and worthy of the severest displeasure. On pretence of expelling the sick spirit, he induced his friend to eat plentifully of certain mysteriously-prepared dishes of berries, which caused vomiting to a serious extent, and had a similar though less powerful effect on others who partook of them. The children also complained that the coffee which was served for breakfast made them sick. On none of these occasions did Matthews taste of the food set before Mr Pierson or the family; and from the account of the circumstances, there can be no doubt of his having, either from knavery or madness,

endeavoured to poison the family, or at least to destroy the life of his deluded patron. Besides causing Mr Pierson to swallow such trash as he offered him, he compelled him to receive the contents of a pitcher of water poured into his mouth from a height of four or five feet. This horrid operation, in which Katy the black servant assisted, brought on strong spasmodic fits, in which the sufferer uttered such dismal groans and sighs as shocked Mrs Folger, and might have induced her to discredit the pretensions of the impostor, and to appeal to a magistrate for protection; but excellent as was this lady's general character, she possessed no firmness to decide in so important a matter, and her sympathy was dissolved in a flood of useless tears.

The water-torture, as it may be called, hastened the fate of the unhappy gentleman, and he was shortly afterwards found dead in his bed. The intelligence of Mr Pierson's death immediately brought Mr Folger from New York, to inquire into the cause of the event, and to superintend the arrangements for the funeral. The representations of the case made by Mrs Folger did not suggest the possibility of Matthews having used any unfair means towards Mr Pierson, but that his death was in some way caused by him through supernatural power. Matthews, indeed, boasted that he could kill any one who doubted his divine character by a mere expression of his will. Singular as it may seem, this madness or villany did not yet release Folger from the impression that Matthews was a divine being; and fearing his assumed power, he had not the resolution to order his departure. In a few days, however, all ceremony on the subject was at an end. An action having been raised by Pierson's heirs to recover the property which the impostor had obtained on false pretences, Matthews refused to resign it, and attempted to justify his conduct to Folger by reasons so completely opposed to the principles of common honesty, that that gentleman's belief at once gave way, and he ordered him to quit the house. This abrupt announcement was received with anything but complacency. The prophet preached, stormed, and threatened; tears likewise were tried; but all was unavailing. Folger respectfully but firmly told him that circumstances required a retrenchment of his expenditure, and that he must seek for a new habitation. Matthews, in short, was turned out of doors.

He was again thrown upon the world, though not in an utterly penniless condition. The right which he held to Pierson's property was in the course of being wrested from him, but he possessed a considerable sum which he had gathered from Folger and a few other disciples, and on this he commenced living until some new and wealthy dupe, as he expected, should countenance his pretensions, and afford him the means of a comfortable subsistence. This expectation was not realised in time to save him from public exposure and shame. Folger, having pondered on a variety of circumstances, felt convinced that he had been

the victim of a designing impostor, that Pierson's death had been caused by foul means, and that the lives of his own family had been exposed to a similar danger. On these suspicions he caused Matthews to be apprehended, for the purpose, in the first place, of being tried on a charge of swindling. On the 16th of October 1834, this remarkable case came on for trial before the Court of Sessions in New York, on an indictment setting forth that Matthews was guilty of "devising by unlawful means to obtain possession of money, goods, chattels, and effects of divers good people of the state of New York; and that the said B. H. Folger, believing his representations, gave the said Matthias one hundred pieces of gold coin, of the value of five hundred and thirty dollars, and one hundred dollars in bank-notes, which the said Matthias feloniously received by means of the false pretences aforesaid." Matthews pled not guilty to the charge, but upon the solicitation of Folger, who seems to have been ashamed to appear publicly as prosecutor, the district attorney dropped the case, and the prisoner was handed over to the authorities of the county of Westchester, on the still more serious accusation of having murdered Mr Pierson.

To bring to a conclusion this melancholy tale of delusion, imposture, and crime, Matthews was arraigned for murder before the court of Oyer and Terminer at Westchester, on the 16th of April 1835. The trial excited uncommon interest, and many persons attended from a great distance, to get a view of the man whose vagaries had made so much noise in the country. The evidence produced for the prosecution was principally that of medical men, who had been commissioned to disinter the body of the deceased, and examine the condition of the stomach, it being a general belief that death had been caused by poison. Unfortunately for the ends of justice, the medical examiners could not agree that the stomach showed indications of a poisonous substance, some alleging that it did, and others affirming the reverse. On this doubtful state of the question, the jury had no other course than to offer a verdict of acquittal. On the announcement of the verdict, the prisoner was evidently elated; but his countenance fell when he found that he was to be tried on another indictment for having assaulted his daughter, Mrs Laisdel, with a whip, on the occasion of her visit to him at Sing-sing; her husband was the prosecutor. Of this misdemeanour he was immediately found guilty, and condemned to three months' imprisonment in the county jail. In passing sentence, the judge took occasion to reprimand him for his gross impostures and impious pretensions, and advised him, when he came out of confinement, to shave his beard, lay aside his peculiar dress, and go to work like an honest man.

Of the ultimate fate of Matthews we have heard no account, and therefore are unable to say whether he renewed his schemes of imposture.

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JOHN NICOLLS THOMS.

In the summer of 1838 the people of Great Britain were startled by the intelligence of a remarkable disturbance in Kent, caused by the assumptions of divine power by a madman named John Nicolls Thoms.

This religious impostor was the son of a small farmer and maltster at St Columb, in Cornwall. He appears to have entered life as cellarman to a wine-merchant in Truro. Succeeding to his master's business, he conducted it for three or four years, when his warehouse was destroyed by fire, and he received £3000 in compensation from an insurance company. Since then, during more than ten years, he had been in no settled occupation. In the year 1833 he appeared as a candidate successively for the representation of Canterbury and East Kent, taking the title of Sir William Percy Honeywood Courtenay, knight of Malta and king of Jerusalem, and further representing himself as the owner by birthright of several estates in Kent. His fine person and manners, and the eloquent appeals he made to popular feeling, secured him a certain degree of favour, but were not sufficient to gain for an obscure adventurer a preferment usually reserved for persons possessing local importance and undoubted fortune. Though baffled in this object, he continued to address the populace as their peculiar friend, and kept up a certain degree of influence amongst them. He is supposed to have connected himself also with a number of persons engaged in the contraband trade, as, in July 1833, he made an appearance in a court of law on behalf of the crew of a smuggling vessel, when he conducted himself in such a way as to incur a charge of perjury. He was consequently condemned to transportation for seven years, but, on a showing of his insanity, was committed to permanent confinement in a lunatic asylum, from which he was discharged a few months before his death, on a supposition that he might safely be permitted to mingle once more in society.

Thoms now resumed his intercourse with the populace, whose opinion of him was probably rather elevated than depressed by his having suffered from his friendship for the smugglers. He repeated his old stories of being a man of high birth, and entitled to some of the finest estates in Kent. He sided with them in their dislike of the new regulations for the poor, and led them to expect that whatever he should recover of his birthright, should be as much for their interest as his own. There were two or three persons of substance who were so far deluded by him as to lend him considerable sums of money. Latterly, pretensions of a more mysterious nature mingled in the ravings of this madman; and he induced a general belief amongst the ignorant

peasantry around Canterbury that he was either the Saviour of mankind sent anew upon earth, or a being of the same order, and commissioned for similar purposes. One of his followers, when asked, after his death, by the correspondent of a newspaper, how he could put faith in such a man, answered in language of the following tenor:—"Oh, sir, he could turn any one that once listened to him whatever way he liked, and make them believe what he pleased. He had a tongue which a poor man could not get over, and a learned man could not gainsay, although standing before him. He puzzled all the lawyers in Canterbury, and they confessed that he knew more of law than all put together. You could not always understand what he said, but when you did, it was beautiful, and wonderful, and powerful, just like his eyes; and then his voice was so sweet! And he was such a grand gentleman, and sometimes latterly such an awful man, and looked so terrible if any one ventured to oppose him, that he carried all before him. Then, again, he was so charitable! While he had a shilling in his pocket, a poor man never should want. And then such expectations as he had, and which nobody could deny! He had papers to prove himself to be either the heir or right possessor of Powderham Castle, and Evington, and Nash Court, and Chilham Castle, and all the estates of the families of the Courtenays, the Percies, and Honeywoods, and of Sir Edward Hales, and Sir Thomas Hindlay, more than I can tell you of. And there was Mr — of Boughton, who lent him £200 on his title-deeds, and the waiter of the — Hotel, in Canterbury, who lent him £73, besides other respectable people throughout the county who let him have as much money on his estates as he pleased, and have kept up a subscription for him ever since he was sent to jail in 1833 about the smugglers he befriended. And at that same time it was well known that he need not have gone to prison unless he liked, for the very ladies of Canterbury would have rescued him, only he forbade them, and said the law should be fulfilled. I myself saw them kissing his hand and his clothes in hundreds that day; and there was one woman that could not reach him with a glass of cordial gin; she threw it into his mouth, and blessed him, and bade him keep a bold heart, and he should yet be free, and king of Canterbury!"

It is further to be observed, that the aspect of the man was imposing. His height approached six feet. His features were regular and beautiful—a broad fair forehead, aquiline nose, small well-cut mouth, and full rounded chin. The only defect of his person was a somewhat short neck; but his shoulders were broad, and he possessed uncommon personal strength. Some curious significations of the enthusiasm he had excited were afterwards observed in the shape of scribblings on the walls of a barn. On the left side of the door were the following sentences:—"If you new he was on earth, your harts Wod turn;" "But dont Wate

to late ;” “They how R.”* On the right side were the following:—“O that great day of gudgegment is close at hand ;” “It now peeps in the dor every man according to his works ;” “Our rites and liberties We Will have.”

On Monday the 28th of May 1838, the frenzy of Thoms and his followers seems to have reached its height. With twenty or thirty persons, in a kind of military order, he went about for three days amongst the farmhouses in Boughton, Sittingbourne, Boulton, and other villages in the vicinity of Canterbury, receiving and paying for refreshment. One woman sent her son to him with a “mother’s blessing,” as to join in some great and laudable work. He proclaimed a great meeting for the ensuing Sunday, which he said was to be “a glorious but bloody day.” At one of the places where he ordered provisions for his followers, it was in these words, “Feed my sheep.” To convince his disciples of his divine commission, he is said to have pointed his pistol at the stars, and told them that he would make them fall from their spheres. He then fired at some star, and his pistol having been rammed down with tow steeped in oil, and sprinkled over with steel filings, produced, on being fired, certain bright sparkles of light, which he immediately said were falling stars. On another occasion he went away from his followers with a man of the name of Wills and two others of the rioters, saying to them, “Do you stay here, whilst I go yonder,” pointing to a bean-stack, “and strike the bloody blow.” When they arrived at the stack, to which they marched with a flag, the flag-bearer laid his flag on the ground, and knelt down to pray. The other then put in, it is said, a lighted match ; but Thoms seized it, and forbade it to burn, and the fire was not kindled. This, on their return to the company, was announced as a miracle.

On Wednesday evening he stopped at the farmhouse of Bossenden, where the farmer Culver, finding that his men were seduced by the impostor from their duty, sent for constables to have them apprehended. Two brothers named Mears, and another man, accordingly went next morning ; but on their approach, Thoms shot Nicolas Mears dead with a pistol, and aimed a blow at his brother with a dagger, whereupon the two survivors instantly fled. At an early hour he was abroad with his followers, to the number of about forty, in Bossenden or Bleanwoods, which were to have been the scene of the great demonstration on Sunday ; and a newspaper correspondent reports the following particulars of the appearance and doings of the fanatics at this place, from a woodcutter who was following his business at the spot:—“Thoms undertook to administer the sacrament in bread and water to the deluded men who followed him. He told them on this occasion, as he did on many others, that there was great oppression in the land, and indeed through-

* Apparently, *They who err.*

out the world; but that if they would follow him, he would lead them on to glory. He depicted the gentry as great oppressors, threatened to deprive them of their estates, and talked of partitioning these into farms of forty or fifty acres among those who followed him. He told them he had come to earth on a cloud, and that on a cloud he should some day be removed from them; that neither bullets nor weapons could injure him or them, if they had but faith in him as their Saviour; and that if ten thousand soldiers came against him, they would either turn to their side or fall dead at his command. At the end of his harangue, Alexander Foad, whose jaw was afterwards shot off by the military, knelt down at his feet and worshipped him; so did another man of the name of Brankford. Foad then asked Thoms whether he should follow him in the body, or go home and follow him in heart. To this Thoms replied, 'Follow me in the body.' Foad then sprang on his feet in an ecstasy of joy, and with a voice of great exultation exclaimed, 'Oh, be joyful! Oh, be joyful! The Saviour has accepted me. Go on—go on; till I drop I'll follow thee!' Brankford also was accepted as a follower, and exhibited the same enthusiastic fervour. At this time his denunciations against those who should desert him were terrific. Fire would come down from heaven and consume them in this world, and in the next eternal damnation was to be their doom. His eye gleamed like a bright coal whilst he was scattering about these awful menaces. The woodcutter was convinced that at that moment Thoms would have shot any man dead who had ventured to quit his company. After this mockery of religion was completed, the woodcutter went to Thoms, shook hands with him, and asked him if it was true that he had shot the constable? 'Yes,' replied Thoms coolly, 'I did shoot the vagabond, and I have eaten a hearty breakfast since. I was only executing upon him the justice of Heaven, in virtue of the power which God has given me.'

The two repulsed constables had immediately proceeded to Faversham, for the purpose of procuring fresh warrants and the necessary assistance. A considerable party of magistrates and other individuals now advanced to the scene of the murder, and about mid-day (Thursday, May 31) approached Thoms' party at a place called the Osier-bed, where the Rev. Mr Handley, the clergyman of the parish, and a magistrate, used every exertion to induce the deluded men to surrender themselves, but in vain. Thoms defied the assailants, and fired at Mr Handley, who then deemed it necessary to obtain military aid before attempting further proceedings. A detachment of the forty-fifth regiment, consisting of a hundred men, was brought from Canterbury, under the command of Major Armstrong. A young officer, Lieutenant Bennett, who belonged to another regiment, and was at Canterbury on furlough, proposed, under a sense of duty, to accompany the party, on the condition

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that he should be allowed to return before six o'clock to dine with some friends. At the approach of the military, Thoms and his men took up a position in Bossenden wood, between two roads. Major Armstrong divided his men into two bodies of equal numbers, that the wood might be penetrated from both of these roads at once, so as to enclose the rioters: the one party he took command of himself, the other was placed under the charge of Lieutenant Bennett. The magistrates who accompanied the party, gave orders to the officers to take Courtenay, as Thoms was usually called, dead or alive, and as many of his men as possible. The two parties then advanced into the wood by opposite paths, and soon came within sight of each other close to the place where the fanatics were posted. A magistrate in Armstrong's party endeavoured to address the rioters, and induce them to surrender; but while he was speaking, the unfortunate Bennett had rushed upon his fate. He had advanced, attended by a single private, probably for the purpose of calling upon the insurgents to submit, when the madman who led them advanced to meet him, and Major Armstrong had just time to exclaim, "Bennett, fall back," when Thoms fired a pistol at him within a few yards of his body. Bennett had apprehended his danger, and had his sword raised to defend himself from the approaching maniac: a momentary collision did take place between him and his slayer; but the shot had lodged with fatal effect in his side, and he fell from his horse a dead man. Thoms fought for a few seconds with others of the assailants, but was prostrated by the soldier attending Mr Bennett, who sent a ball through his brain. The military party then poured in a general discharge of fire-arms on the followers of the impostor, of whom nine were killed, and others severely wounded, one so fatally as to expire afterwards. A charge was made upon the remainder by the surviving officer, and they were speedily overpowered and taken into custody.

A reporter for the Morning Chronicle newspaper, who was immediately after on the spot where this sad tragedy was acted, gave the following striking account of the local feeling on the occasion:—"The excitement which prevails here, in Boulton, the scene of the murder of Lieutenant Bennett, and of the punishment of his assassins, and the wretched peasantry who were deluded and misled by Courtenay, exceeds anything I ever before witnessed. It was evident, upon listening to the observations of the peasantry, especially of the females, that the men who have been shot are regarded by them as martyrs, while their leader was considered, and is venerated, as a species of divinity. The rumour amongst them is, that '*he is to rise again on Sunday.*' Incredible as it may appear, I have been assured of this as a positive fact with respect to the utter folly and madness of the lower orders here. A more convincing proof of the fanaticism that prevails cannot be afforded than the fact,

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that a woman [by name Sarah Culver] was apprehended yesterday who was discovered washing the face of Courtenay, and endeavouring to pour some water between his lips. She, upon being interrogated, declared that she had that day followed him for more than half a mile with a pail of water, and her reason for it was, that he had desired her, if he should happen to be killed, *to put some water between his lips, and he would rise again in a month.* One of the prisoners, Wills, who had received a slight wound from Major Armstrong, the commander of the party, told him that he and the other men who were with Courtenay would have attacked two thousand soldiers, *as they were persuaded by Courtenay that they could not be shot,* and it was under this impression they were determined upon fighting."

Another local observer reports:—"Such is the veneration in which numbers here hold Thoms, that various sums of money have been offered to obtain a lock of his hair and a fragment of the blood-stained shirt in which he died. The women, with whom he was a prodigious favourite, seek these relics with the greatest avidity, and are described as receiving them with the most enthusiastic devotion."

Two of the rioters were tried at Maidstone, August 9, on the charge of being principals with Thoms in the murder of Nicolas Mears, and found guilty. Eight were tried on the ensuing day, charged with the murder of Lieutenant Bennett; they pleaded guilty, and received the appropriate sentence. It was, however, thought proper that capital punishment should not be inflicted on these men, seeing that they had been acting under infatuation.

Mr Liardet, a gentleman deputed to make some inquiries respecting the Kentish disturbances, observes, in a report on the subject, that the main cause of the delusion was *ignorance.* "A little consideration of rural life," says he, "will show the danger of leaving the peasantry in such a state of ignorance. In the solitude of the country, the uncultivated mind is much more open to the impressions of fanaticism than in the bustle and collision of towns. In such a stagnant state of existence the mind acquires no activity, and is unaccustomed to make those investigations and comparisons necessary to detect imposture. The slightest semblance of evidence is often sufficient with them to support a deceit which elsewhere would not have the smallest chance of escaping detection. If we look for a moment at the absurdities and inconsistencies practised by Thoms, it appears at first utterly inconceivable that any persons out of a lunatic asylum could have been deceived by him. That an imposture so gross and so slenderly supported should have succeeded, must teach us, if anything will, the folly and danger of leaving the agricultural population in the debasing ignorance which now exists among them."

MORMONISM.

The sect of the Mormonites, or Latter-Day Saints, has of late years become familiar by these names in Great Britain. They derive their first and standing appellation from a work called the Book of Mormon, assumed by them to be the fruit of inspiration and revelation, and taken as the text-book and bible of the sect. The Book of Mormon, published two or three times in North America, and once in Britain in 1841, had the following origin:—

A number of years since, a young man named Joseph Smith, the founder, apostle, and prophet of the Mormonites, followed the profession of a *money-digger* in the United States. It is a common belief in some of the maritime districts of that republic, that large sums of money and masses of bullion were there buried in the earth by the buccaneers, as well as, more recently, by persons concerned in the revolution. The pretence of discovering these treasures by incantations was an artifice to which needy and cunning men frequently resorted, and Joseph Smith, according to the best testimony, distinguished himself peculiarly in this line. While he was engaged in these and similar pursuits, he received, as his own story runs, several revelations from heaven relative to the religious sects of the day. On the first occasion when he was thus favoured, he had gone into a grove, and there besought divine aid to show him which, of all the denominations of the Christian church then existing, he ought to reverence and follow as the true one. A bright light, he said, appeared above his head; he was received up into the midst of it; and he there saw two angelic personages, who told him that all his sins were forgiven, that the whole world was in error on religious points, and that the truth should be made known to him in due time. A second revelation of a similar description informed Smith that the American Indians were a remnant of the children of Israel, and that prophets and inspired men had once existed amongst them, by whom divine records had been deposited in a secure place, to save them from the hands of the wicked. A third communication, made on the morning of September 22, 1823, informed Smith that these relics were to be found in a cavern on a large hill to the east of the mail-road from Palmyra, Wayne county, state of New York. Here, accordingly, Joseph made search, and, as he says, found a stone-chest containing plates like gold, about seven by eight inches in width and length, and not quite so thick as common tin. On these plates was graven the Book or Bible of Mormon, so called from the name given to the party supposed to have written and concealed it. Smith was not allowed to take away these golden plates until he had learned

the Egyptian language, in which tongue, or a modern dialect of it, the graven book was composed. At length, in September 1827, Smith was deemed qualified to receive the golden plates, and he transcribed an English version of the characters, which was published in the year 1830. The work made a considerable impression on the poorer classes of the United States, and a sect was formed soon afterwards, calling themselves "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints." From their text-book they were more familiarly called the "Mormonites."

In the preparation, or at least promulgation of these pretended revelations, Smith was assisted by his father, and by persons called Rigdon, Harris, and others. At first little attention was paid to the imposture; but when it appeared to be undermining the religious belief and habits of the less instructed portion of the community, the respectable citizens of Palmyra and Manchester, where the Smiths formerly resided, felt it their duty to expose the real character of the Smiths. An affidavit was accordingly made by about fifty gentlemen, of various professions, and of diverse religious sentiments. The following is a copy of this document:—

"PALMYRA, N. Y., Dec. 4, 1833.—We, the undersigned, having been acquainted with the Smith family for a number of years, while they resided near this place, have no hesitation in saying, that we consider them destitute of that moral character which ought to entitle them to the confidence of any community. They were particularly infamous for visionary projects, spent much of their time in digging for money, which they pretended was laid in the earth; and to this day large excavations may be seen in the earth not far from their residence, where they used to spend their time in digging for hidden treasures. Joseph Smith, senior, and his son Joseph, were in particular considered entirely destitute of moral character, and addicted to vicious habits. Martin Harris had acquired a considerable property, and in matters of business his word was considered good; but on moral and religious subjects he was perfectly visionary; sometimes advocating one sentiment, sometimes another. In reference to all with whom we are acquainted that have embraced Mormonism from this neighbourhood, we are compelled to say that they were visionary, and most of them destitute of moral character, and without influence in the community. This is the reason why they were permitted to go on with their imposition undisturbed. It was not supposed that any of them were possessed of sufficient character or influence to make any one believe their book or their sentiments; and we know not a single individual in this vicinity who puts the least confidence in their pretended revelations."* [Here follow the signatures of fifty-one persons.]

* Rise, Progress, and Causes of Mormonism, by Professor J. B. Turner. New York: 1844.

RELIGIOUS IMPOSTORS.

A similar testimony is recorded against the Smiths from respectable citizens in Manchester; and with respect to an assistant in the fraud, named Oliver Cowdery, in an affidavit presented by the authority before us, he is shown to be "a worthless fellow, and not to be trusted or believed." Whitmer, another member of this impious confederacy, is spoken of with equal disrespect.

The religion which these wretched impostors proposed to disseminate, appears to be a mixture of Christianity, drawn from garbled portions of the common English translation of the Scriptures, and the fancies of an irregular and ill-educated mind. The Book of Mormon, on which the deceitful doctrines of the sect are founded, is nearly of the same extent as the Old Testament, and contains, properly speaking, two distinct stories or histories. The history of the Nephites, a portion of the tribe of Joseph, supposed to have emigrated from Jerusalem under a prophet named Nephi, and to have been miraculously led to America, occupies the first part of the work. The Nephites founded, says the story, the Indian race. Many years after their settlement, they are also stated to have discovered the records of the Jaredites, an extinct nation which came to America about the time of the building of Babel. The revelations of various prophets to these Jaredites and Nephites, and direct divine communications respecting "my servant, Joseph Smith," the apostle of the present day, compose the staple matter of the Book of Mormon.

One main, if not the only object of the imposture, has been to exalt Joseph Smith as a grand head and director of the church; the other offices being filled by creatures subordinate to his will, and sharers in the plunder of the dupes. There are two distinct orders of church dignitaries—1. The MELCHIZEDEC, or High Priesthood, consisting of high priests and elders; 2. The AARONIC, or Lesser Priesthood, consisting of bishops, priests, teachers, and deacons. The former preside over the spiritual interests of the church; the latter administer its ordinances, and manage its temporal concerns. Three of the Melchizedec, or High Priests, are appointed presidents, to preside over all the churches in the world, and are called the First Presidency. There are also subordinate presidencies, ruling over towns or districts, called Stakes; and the appointment of these stakes in new regions in North America affords Mr Smith a favourable opportunity, as it has been observed, for speculating in "town lots."

The harangues of the Mormon preachers, abounding in allusions to the Christian doctrines, are well calculated to confuse and deceive the minds of unlearned hearers; but when investigated, the pretensions on which the whole fabric is reared appear eminently absurd and impious. From beginning to end the Book of Mormon is filled with evidences of forgery and

imposture. The peculiar style of holy writ is borrowed throughout, and, as regards words and names, many separate languages are drawn upon, proving the assumed writer of early ages to have all the information of our day before him. The difficulty arising from the red colour of the Indian skin, so different from that of the Jews, is overcome by the arbitrary and easy medium of a miracle. Their colour is said to have been changed as a punishment for their sins. Things are spoken of which, it is well known, were not invented till late times. For example, it is said by the prophet Nephi, in allusion to a mutiny that took place on his voyage to America, "And it came to pass, after they had loosed me, behold, I took the *compass*, and it did work whither I desired it." Besides antedating the discovery of the needle's polarity by several centuries, the writer here evidently misunderstands the use of the compass altogether. A Mormonite elder, being pressed on the subject of this blunder, pointed to the account of St Paul's voyage, which has this sentence in the English version: "We *fetch'd a compass*, and came to Rhesium." The misapprehension of this sentence, the first words of which mean merely, "We made a circuit," had obviously led to the blunder of the composer of the Book of Mormon. According to a paper in the Athenæum: "The history of the pretended Israelites is continued in the Books of Enos, Jarom, Zeniff, &c. and through them all we find one signal proof not merely of imposture, but of the ignorance of the impostor, repeated with singular pertinacity. Every successive prophet predicts to the Nephites the future coming of Christ: the writer has fallen into the vulgar error of mistaking an epithet for a name; the word 'Christ,' as all educated persons know, is not a name, but a Greek title of office, signifying 'The Anointed,' being in fact a translation of the Hebrew word *Messiah*. It is true that in modern times, and by a corruption which is now become inveterate, the term is used by western Christians as if it were a proper name, or at least an untranslatable designation; but this is a modern error, and it has been avoided by most of the Oriental churches. Now, the use of a Greek term, in an age when the Greek language was unformed, and by a people with whom it is impossible for Greeks to have intercourse, and, moreover, whose native language was of such peculiar construction as not to be susceptible of foreign admixture, is a mark of forgery so obvious and decisive, that it ought long since to have exposed the delusion. Unhappily, however, we are forced to conclude, from the pamphlets before us, that the American Methodists, who first undertook to expose the Mormonites, were scarcely less ignorant than themselves.

A second Nephi takes up the history at a period contemporary with the events recorded in the New Testament. It avers that our Lord exhibited himself to the Nephites after his resurrection,

and the words attributed to him bear still more conclusive evidence of the ignorance of the impostors:—

‘Behold, I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God. I created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are.’ And again, ‘I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.’

In addition to the former blunder respecting the name ‘Christ,’ we have the name ‘Jesus’ in its Greek form, and not, as the Hebrews would have called it, ‘Joshua;’ but we have, furthermore, the names of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet given as a metaphorical description of continued existence to a nation that had never heard of the Greek language. It is quite clear that the writer mistook Alpha and Omega for some sacred and mystic sounds, to which particular sanctity was attached—a blunder by no means confined to the Mormonites—and wrote them down without perceiving that they were an evidence of forgery so palpable as to be manifest to schoolboys.”

The same authority which we have now quoted gives a hint of the probable origin of this whole imposture; for, as we shall show, Joseph Smith is a man scarcely capable of inventing or writing even the ravings of the Book of Mormon. A clergyman named Solomon Spaulding had left his ministry, and entered into business in Cherry Vale, New York, where he failed in the year 1809. The sepulchral mounds of North America were then exciting some interest, and it struck Spaulding that he might relieve himself from his distresses by composing a novel, connecting these mounds with the lost ten tribes of Israel, supposed by some to have peopled America. Intending to name his work “The Manuscript Found,” he wrote it in the old style of the Hebrew compositions. In 1812 the work was taken to a printer named Lamdin, residing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; but the author died ere any arrangement could be made for its publication. Lamdin also died in 1826. He had previously lent the manuscript to a person named Sidney Rigdon, and this person it seems to have been who, in connection with his friend Joseph Smith, formed the idea of palming it on the world as a *new revelation*. The manuscript was well suited to their purposes, and of course they would make such changes as appeared requisite. That this was the true source of the Book of Mormon, is borne out by the testimony of the wife, brother, partner, and several friends of Spaulding, who had heard him read portions of the manuscript, and who recognised many of the names and incidents in the Book of Mormon to be the same with those occurring in Spaulding’s novel. The difficulty of supposing paper of any kind to have been so long preserved, appears to have suggested the additional and characteristic device of the “plates of gold” to the money-digger, Mr Joseph Smith. Sidney Rigdon is now the “prophet’s” secretary. He, by the way, and a few other persons, have alone been honoured with a sight of the said plates.

It might be deemed superfluous to say so much on this subject, were it not that the Mormon delusion has spread widely in North America, and even in Great Britain. Joseph Smith and his colleagues settled in 1831 on the Missouri, whence they were soon after expelled on account of their lawless conduct. They then went to Illinois, and founded a town or city, called Nauvoo, near the Mississippi, said now to contain 1700 able-bodied men, exclusive of women and children. To this place too many emigrants are directing their course even from Great Britain. What sort of people they will find in the persons of the prophet and his associates, appears very clearly from a little work by Mr Caswall, who visited the city of the Mormons in the year 1842. The following is his picture of Joseph Smith:—

“I met Joseph Smith at a short distance from his dwelling, and was introduced to him. I had the honour of an interview with him who is a prophet, a seer, a merchant, a ‘revelator,’ a president, an elder, an editor, and the general of the ‘Nauvoo Legion.’ He is a coarse plebeian person in aspect, and his countenance exhibits a curious mixture of the knave and the clown. His hands are large and fat, and on one of his fingers he wears a massive gold ring, upon which I saw an inscription. His dress was of coarse country manufacture, and his white hat was enveloped by a piece of black crape as a sign of mourning for his deceased brother Don Carlos Smith, the late editor of the ‘Times and Seasons.’ His age is about thirty-five. I had not an opportunity of observing his eyes, as he appears deficient in that open straightforward look which characterises an honest man. He led the way to his house, accompanied by a host of elders, bishops, preachers, and common Mormons. On entering the house, chairs were provided for the prophet and myself, while the curious and gaping crowd remained standing. I handed a book to the prophet and begged him to explain its contents. He asked me if I had any idea of its meaning. I replied that I believed it to be a Greek Psalter, but that I should like to hear his opinion. ‘No,’ he said; ‘it aint Greek at all, except, perhaps, a few words. What aint Greek is Egyptian, and what aint Egyptian is Greek. This book is very valuable. It is a dictionary of Egyptian hieroglyphics.’ Pointing to the capital letters at the commencement of each verse, he said, ‘Them figures is Egyptian hieroglyphics, and them which follows is the interpretation of the hieroglyphics, written in the reformed Egyptian. Them characters is like the letters that was engraved on the golden plates.’ Upon this the Mormons around began to congratulate me on the information I was receiving. ‘There,’ they said, ‘we told you so—we told you that our prophet would give you satisfaction. None but our prophet can explain these mysteries.’” The error of taking a Greek Psalter for a specimen of Egyptian hieroglyphics, sufficiently proves the slender pretensions of Mr Joseph Smith to be a mystery-expounder.

In another part of the book Mr Caswell relates a few personal anecdotes of this worthy, mentioned to him by credible witnesses; but they refer to such scenes of drunkenness and profanity, that we should not feel justified in transcribing them. Enough, we think, has been said to expose the character of a dangerous impostor, and to prevent individuals amongst our working population from expending their little all on the faith of such a man's promises. We have before us a letter from an unfortunate cotton-spinner of Lancashire, which shows how necessary such a caution is. The Mormon preachers in England had described Nauvoo to him as a land overflowing with milk and honey, and a place where the Divine Being had commanded a temple to be built, that might be a refuge to all mankind. Joseph Smith, at least, had certainly commanded this, as the following very unequivocal passages from his writings will show:—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, let all my saints come from afar, and send ye swift messengers, yea, chosen messengers, and say unto them, 'Come ye with all your gold, and your silver, and your precious stones, and with all your antiquities; and all who have knowledge of antiquities that will come may come; and bring the box-tree, and the fir-tree, and the pine-tree, together with all the precious trees of the earth; and with iron, and with copper, and with brass, and with zinc, and with all your precious things of the earth, and build a house to my name, for the Most High to dwell therein; for there is not a place found upon earth that he may come and restore again that which was lost unto you, or which he hath taken away, even the fulness of the priesthood.'"

By such blasphemous and deceitful stuff as this the poor cotton-spinner, like too many others, was induced to go to Nauvoo, where, like other victims of delusion, he was wretchedly used. It is needless to carry our notice of this matter further. Every shadow of evidence yet obtained tends to prove Mormonism to be a gross imposture, and one unworthy of notice, save on account of the dangers which have here been described and exposed.

Since writing the above, intelligence has arrived in England that Joseph Smith, the leader of the Mormons, was killed by a lawless mob on the 27th of June at Carthage, state of Illinois. This event is to be deplored, not only on account of its being a barbarous murder, but because it will be considered in the light of a martyrdom by the infatuated followers of the deceased, and no way tend to abate the Mormon delusion.